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The relation of color naming and the environment

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Abstract: Color naming across languages has generally been held to be shaped either by universal constraints, or by local linguistic convention. However, another possibility is that color naming may be influenced by local environmental factors, such as the relative frequency of different colors (color diet). This study investigates that possibility. Color diet correlates with the Köppen-Geiger climate classification system, which divides the earth's surface into climate categories. Each language in the World Color Survey, a large body of cross-language color naming data, was categorized according to the climate category for the location where that language is spoken. Rainforest and monsoon languages, both of which have green-heavy color diets, were found to have color naming systems that differ significantly from those of savanna languages, which have relatively little green in their diets. These results suggest a link between climate-driven color diet and color naming.